

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
Office of the Secretary
Washington 25, D. C.

October 27, 1958

Dear Mr. Secretary:

You have no doubt been advised of the increasing concern being expressed in the Pacific Northwest as well as generally in the Nation regarding the preservation and conservation of the anadromous fish resource of the Columbia River Basin. The unfortunate loss of substantial numbers of fish in connection with the partial washout of the fish trap facilities at the Oxbow Dam on the Snake River has once again brought into sharp focus the need for the fullest consideration of the preservation of our fish and wildlife resources in connection with the planning and construction of water resources projects.

The key area remaining in the Columbia River Basin for the production of anadromous fish is the Middle Snake River Basin, up to and including the watershed of the Imnaha River. It is essential that this area be safeguarded from possible destruction as a fish-producing area of the Columbia River Basin. All of this reach of the Middle Snake River Basin is vital for this purpose. The Nation can ill afford to sacrifice any of it at the present time. This is particularly true when there are sites remaining elsewhere for the provision of water-control projects for regulation of the Columbia River and its tributaries.

Both the Department of the Army and the Department of the Interior are, of course, engaged in the planning of additional needed water-control projects in the Columbia River Basin. We understand that the Corps of Engineers is presently considering a number of dams in the Middle Snake River Basin below the Imnaha which would present very grave problems for the maintenance and development of anadromous fish production in the area. The above considerations have impelled this Department repeatedly to urge that, for the present, activities on the main stem of the Middle Snake should be directed to early completion of a full investigation of the multiple-purpose possibilities of the sites above the mouth of the Imnaha. In the existing circumstances, I can see no other practicable course if development of a construction program is to keep pace with the needs of the Pacific Northwest.

I earnestly recommend that the Department of the Army join with the Department of the Interior in deferring the planning

and recommendation of any more dams in this reach of the Middle Snake River Basin below the Imnaha until such time as competent fishery authorities agree that the problem of passing anadromous fish over high dams, both upstream and downstream, has been successfully and practically solved. As you know, this Department, with considerable assistance from the Corps of Engineers, has been advancing its biological and engineering research on this problem at the maximum possible rate. Although significant gains have been made toward the solution of the problem, we still have a long way to go.

Even when the fish-passage problem has been solved, there will still remain the loss of spawning and rearing areas as a result of flooding by reservoirs.

I urge therefore that your Department join with ours in the adoption of a firm policy of orienting our planning for the undoubted water-control needs of the Pacific Northwest to areas other than this critical portion of the Middle Snake River Basin unless already specifically required by the Congress, until we can be sure that we will not needlessly harm the vital fishery resource. Once this resource is destroyed, it will be difficult if not impossible to restore it for a particular stream or river basin, even with the future development of satisfactory fish-passage facilities.

Our studies to date, though preliminary in nature, indicate that there are storage sites above the Imnaha of considerable potential which can be developed now. These reservoirs, taken together with other projects in the general area which can be undertaken after the fish-passage problem is satisfactorily solved, will meet the objective of full comprehensive development.

We would appreciate very much your earnest consideration of this proposal as soon as possible, and we hope that future reports by our two Departments on the development of the Columbia River Basin will be consistent in reflecting these principles.

Sincerely yours,

(Sgd) Fred A. Seaton
Secretary of the Interior

Hon. Wilber M. Brucker
Secretary of the Army
Washington 25, D. C.